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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/14/2018

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [KTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ABLD](#) [NO](#)

SUBJECT: NORWAY: GROWING AWARENESS OF TERRORISM THREAT

Classified By: Charge Kevin M. Johnson for reasons 1.4 b and d

¶1. (C) Summary: In a significant shift we have long advocated, the GON has strengthened its counter terrorism awareness, capabilities and planning. This includes a revised law on terrorism, an increased threat perception, arrests of terrorist financiers and new physical and electronic security measures. Norway,s first terrorist trial begins soon and its success or failure will be key to Norway,s counter terrorism policies. Norway still lags behinds its neighbors in awareness and preparedness for terror incidents but we will use this momentum to fight prevailing opinion that "it couldn't happen here." End Summary

Legal Reforms

¶2. (C) The first significant step taken on counterterrorism this year was the passage of a revised law dealing with punishment for terrorist acts. The original 2005 law needed updating to bring it more into line with UN and other international standards and the Ministry of Justice began work on a revised version in early 2007. During the summer of 2007 relevant Washington agencies provided comments and questions regarding potential weaknesses in the law to Norwegian authorities. The revised law, passed by Parliament February 28, clarifies the legal mechanisms Norwegian authorities have at their disposal to prosecute terrorist acts. Opinion is divided on how much the changes strengthen the counter terrorism legal regime and will remain so until tested in the courts. Note: An analysis by post,s Legatt (resident in Copenhagen) concluded that Norway,s revised laws would have been sufficient to arrest similar suspects as those arrested in Copenhagen for planning a terrorist attack. End Note

¶3. (C) Proposed revisions to the foreigners law (to be reviewed this spring) will also provide additional legal tools, such as house arrest and increased surveillance to deal with asylum seekers and other immigrants deemed threats to Norwegian security. The need for these changes was starkly demonstrated by the case of Mullah Krekar, the suspected leader of Ansar-al-Islam who has lived in Norway for years. Krekar was declared a threat to Norwegian society and ordered deported from Norway in 2007 but remains in Norway because human rights concerns over the death penalty prevent his deportation to Iraq.

Threat Evaluation

¶4. (C) The Norwegian Police Security Service (PST) has primary responsibility for domestic counter terrorism

actions. Every year PST releases a threat evaluation which analyzes developments in the Norwegian domestic security situation. For the first time, the 2008 threat evaluation acknowledged that politically motivated violence inspired by extreme Islam represents a threat to Norway. The report also stressed the growing danger of radicalization of Norwegian Muslim youth. Although the report stressed that the main threat of terrorist action was directed outside Norway, the report was a significant step in increasing public awareness of the threat. The report highlighted financial support of suspected foreign terrorist groups as the most common problem.

Financing Terror

15. (C) Events quickly provided evidence that the PST evaluation was correct. In February, the media reported that two of the three Algerians arrested in 2005 by Italian police, and recently sentenced for planning a terror attack, had Al-Qaeda links and had lived in Oslo from 2004 up until their arrest in 2005. When they were arrested they were headed back to their safe-house in Oslo, apparently unaware that PST had been monitoring their activities. Although this group was thwarted, the case demonstrated how easy it would be for a terror group to use Norway as a fund raising and safe base.

16. (C) Again proving their threat evaluation accurate, the PST on March 1 announced the arrest of three Somali-Norwegians for terror financing. The three were arrested for sending money to the Somali Al-Shabaab group. Two of the three were soon released but remain under a travel ban. The third remains in custody. PST announced that these three had transferred 9 million dollars to an account in Dubai. This action caused much unrest among the Somali community in Norway and led to a public debate with some claiming that Al-Shabaab is a resistance movement, not a terrorist organization. In an uncharacteristically strong reply, PST stated that any group which uses terror tactics against civilians will be considered a terrorist group and sending money to that group will be considered a crime.

17. (C) These arrests highlight the continuing problem with hawala-type money transfers in Norway. Norwegian officials have investigated nine hawala systems since 1999, run by Iraqis and Somalis, and found that these had transferred over 100 million dollars out of the country in that time. There is growing discussion of hawala transactions in Parliament and in the banking sector with many calling for the system to be legalized, and thus regulated.

Combating Terror

18. (C) Growing awareness of a terror threat is not limited to security officials. City officials have agreed (after direct intervention of police and the Prime Minister,s office) to close at least one street in the government quarter, particularly around the Prime Minister,s office. (Note: Sensitivity to security by the City Council did not however extend to allowing the NEC permit process to move forward, but does open the door to closing streets around the current Embassy location, if needed. End Note)

19. (C) Norway is also now considering implementing a system which will require communication companies to store information on email addresses and phone conversations for potential use in criminal trials. Both these steps are very unusual in privacy conscious Norwegian society and demonstrate a growing awareness of the need to take security seriously, even in) what Norwegians consider - peaceful Norway.

110. (C) Perhaps the most significant development in the next few months will be the Bhatti trial, to be held this spring. Arfan Bhatti, a Pakistani Norwegian, remains the only individual in custody after the September 2006 arrest of four individuals suspected of shooting an Oslo synagogue and planning attacks on the U.S. and Israeli embassies.

Bhatti,s trial will be the true test of the legal system,s ability to handle a terrorism case as it is Norway's first terrorism case. Failure to successfully prosecute Bhatti could lead to reluctance to use terrorism legislation and hamper efforts by police to continue their efforts to raise public and governmental awareness of the threat of terrorism.

Other Impacts

¶11. (C) Growing attention to the terrorist threat is a welcome development but it has an impact on other PST responsibilities such as counter-espionage. As PST has devoted steadily more resources to counter terrorism its counter-espionage efforts have lagged due to budget constraints. Media reports have highlighted this dilemma, citing record levels of espionage activity in Norway. Although PST would not say, other sources state that current Russian intelligence activity equals or exceeds Cold War levels. Norwegian activities in the Barents area and energy companies, technology are two areas of interest for the Russians, according to a representative for Industry Security Council. Members of certain immigrant communities (Vietnamese-Norwegians have been among those populations targeted) have also reported incidences of increases surveillance of their movements by security services of their country of origin.

Comment

¶12. (C) Norway,s growing awareness of the terrorist threat is welcome and something post has long promoted as an interagency priority, the GON still lags behind Denmark and Sweden in both preparedness and capabilities. PST is doing what it can to meet the challenges of terrorism and espionage but without increases in its budget its effectiveness will be limited. Embassy cooperation with police and security services remains good and we repeatedly press Norwegian authorities to take terrorism seriously. We will seek to build on this momentum to fight the still-prevalent feeling that terrorism happens elsewhere, not in peaceful Norway.
JOHNSON